



DIY² Lab – Summary Report

Group dynamics online

In March 2021, IJAB launched its new project DIY² Lab: Do-it-Yourself in Digital International Youth Work for experts, project managers and team leaders who want to explore the possibilities afforded by digital international youth work. The DIY² Labs are an opportunity for experts and team leaders to try out digital tools and methods and discuss practical as well as more fundamental issues associated with digital international youth work in the group. The events are usually held on Zoom. Since January 2022, the DIY² Lab has been held once a month, alternately in English and German, and is advertised on the website. The documentation of the previous laboratories can also be found there, each in German and English.

After two years of online meetings we all gained a lot of experience how digital youth work can look like. Time to summarise and point out what we can do to use this new opportunity. In the DIY² Lab on July 7th, 2022 (2 - 3:30 p.m. CET) we exchanged conclusions and discussed our ideas on the following questions:

- Group dynamics in digital youth exchange - how can you recognise and support what is happening on the screen?
- From either digital or live to digital and live
- What makes sense to do online and can work also good or even better?
- What makes digital group dynamics specific?



The DIY² Lab was supported by Christoph Schneider-Laris, responsible for the Voluntary Service Program at Paritätische Freiwilligendienste Sachsen gGmbH. He works as social educator in International Youth Work, organizes and facilitates german-polish youth exchanges and specialists programs. He specializes in group dynamics, language animation, vocational exchanges and experiential education.

Foto: DPJW

DIY² Lab

Since January 2022, the DIY² lab is been held alternately in German and English.

Program

Check-in activity:

To get to know each other and to get into the subject, participants were invited to answer the following question by writing in the chat:

Group dynamics is for me...

The answers reflected quite different aspects of the topic:

- important/ vital/ essential, when working with groups
- essential for learning
- a basis for learning
- an important prerequisite for feeling comfortable
- great to see what is going on in groups...
- online not easy to handle, maybe
- communication, learning
- fragile
- getting along as a team
- sometimes scaring...

Activity: Speed-Dating in Break-Out-Sessions

In 3 rounds of 3 minutes, participants discussed in alternating groups of two on the following questions:

Round 1: Choose 3 emojis that represent your person and present them to the other person.

Round 2: What means group dynamics for me? (to deepen the aspects identified in the check-in session)

Round 3: Digital or live - What speaks for one or the other?

The most important learnings of the group discussions were presented to the others in the chat:

- Online can complement presence, but not replace it.
- Online and presence actually only work together :-)
- Online and live meetings both have good pros :)
- Digitally you can provide another person with more and varied channels to build a relationship.
- We have more options online.
- New possibilities and tools have been discovered.
- Influencing group dynamics is more difficult online.
- It is more difficult to perceive the mood of the participants digitally – that is why it is important to counteract this at an early stage so that not everyone has switched off their cameras at some point.

Christoph Schneider-Laris pointed out, that the challenge is to find out what can be better designed online and when live settings are worthwhile. You have to get a feeling for that. How can they be combined?

Introduction to group dynamics in digital encounters

What is easier in the digital space than in live encounters?

One's own, individual environment, the things around us can be better included.

To illustrate this, Christoph Schneider-Laris proposed an activity:

"Find an object, that is for you connected to group dynamics and say a sentence about it."

After a few minutes to explore their rooms, the participants, one after the other, held their object up to the camera, explained their thoughts and then called on the next person.

We often hear about boring online events. But there was already boredom before. In presence, the participants only make more of an effort to cover it up. Presence is not automatically good, online is not automatically bad. It is important to combine different methods in a varied way and to respond to current needs.

Activity: Find the letter

A letter is displayed. In the language that comes to mind first, find an object that begins with that letter. As soon as it is found, show it to the camera. The winner is the first person to hold an object up to the camera. Then all the objects are named in turn in the different languages of the participants and written in the chat. Any number of rounds can be played.

Introduction to group dynamics, part II

In the digital space, we should choose activities where emotions are recognisable. When choosing, it is important to bear in mind that faces are usually visible. Other reactions such as movements, sounds, tones, on the other hand, can only be perceived poorly or not at all.

group dynamics - at a glance

- let it take more time
- change the method
- find a new frame for you
- informal time need to be organized
- live does't automatically mean better

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Screenshot: IJAB

One participant remarked that private things become more visible. In international work, this can bring the reality of the partners' lives closer. However, it can also be problematic if participants do not want to share their private environment. Virtual backgrounds can be used here, for example.

- Changing methods should always be part of the process.
- It does not work to transfer education times one-to-one. It is about finding good time slots and a good rhythm for oneself and for the target group. This also means thinking and trying out completely new things, even if this is sometimes made difficult by the funding requirements.
- Online time doesn't have to mean sitting at a screen all the time. "Outdoor tasks" can be set that are worked on outside the room. In the case of teamwork, contact can be established via mobile phones.
- Informal getting to know each other must be planned in the digital space. This can be cooking together, informal conversations, playing games together. In any case, it must be planned separately in terms of time.

Discussion

- What works easier online?
 - > You can get together quickly from many different places without complicated logistics, even for short periods of time.
 - > More communication channels open up, also among the participants. However, the mixing of private and public is striking and should be reflected upon.
 - > Information and facts can be shared more quickly. Pictures, documents or objects can be shown immediately.
- What is a good framework for online encounters? (Time, rhythm...)
 - > It depends on how varied the implementation is. For example, you can lead the participants through a building and show them different rooms. You can set tasks that are not done on the computer. After a maximum of 2 hours there should be a break.
 - > A unit should not last longer than 1.5 hours, monologues no longer than 15 minutes. Afterwards, breakout sessions are recommended, in which questions are formulated that are then taken up in the plenary (1 question per room). If less time is allocated in the plenary, the number of breakout rooms can be kept small so that there are also fewer questions.
 - > In our own event, simultaneous interpretation was used in some cases and consecutive interpretation in others. In these cases, 1.5 resp 3 times the time must be taken into account.
 - > If there is a large time difference, the possible time windows can be relatively small and not very flexible.
 - > Digitally, there is the contradiction that on the one hand group dynamics need time, but on the other hand online events should be shorter, 1.5 to max. 2 hours. This can be countered with a series of short events in which the past content is always taken up again.
 - > Since in the digital space there are often other appointments immediately afterwards, it is more important to finish on time. Even then, however, it remains a cognitive challenge for all of us to keep thinking our way into completely different content.
 - > Groups of two are very comfortable and offer a certain amount of freedom.
- Is there any literature on group dynamics in the digital space?
 - > No one is aware of anything specific in this field.
 - > However, one participant pointed to the site www.leadinggroupsonline.org
 - > Here you can read the documentation of the DIY² Lab on [Online Group Dynamics using the 5 Rhythms](#)

Check-out activity: A gift to the group

Participants were asked to write one word in the chat, which they wanted to give to the group.

Digital Tools

Zoom (videoconference tool): <https://zoom.us>

Evaluation tool www.edkimo.com

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